



## AAC Publications

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### Zembrocal

Africa, Réunion

Saint Leu, Réunion, 5 p.m. I'm sitting on the veranda of a little bungalow, the sun setting over a black sand beach. It is our last day on the island. I receive a text message: "I did it, thank you team." At first I don't understand. Then I feel a wave of happiness when I realize what has happened: Yuji has finished our climb!

Yuji Hirayama and Sam Elias had returned for one last try on Zembrocal, the multi-pitch route we'd opened during three weeks of effort in June in the heart of this volcanic island. James Pearson, Jacopo Larcher, and I already had headed back to civilization to start packing. Yuji was still trying to free the crux fifth pitch, the last that hadn't fallen. The guys had settled around 8c+ for the grade: a 17m overhanging dihedral, with barely any footholds on the smooth gabbro rock, and just a thin crack that sometimes was too small for the fingers. Yuji's redpoint was the final, happy ending to our adventure, to my big project.

I grew up on this tiny dot on the map, east of Madagascar in the southern Indian Ocean. Here, I discovered climbing. But in this remote French department, climbing was all about competition. We climbed on the rock, but our aims were indoors.

I left my Réunion when I was 16 to train at the national center in France, more than 9,000 kilometers from my family. I spent 10 years exploring my mental and physical limits on plastic. For me, competition was about giving the best you have in maximum-stress situations. Not that different from outdoor climbing, no? After reaching my goals in World Cups, I turned to the outdoors. I got a taste of fear, engagement, and of "real climbing," as some would say. It was time to go back to my people, my origins, and play a bit of the new game I had found.

Some childhood friends helped me find the wall in the Cirque de Cilaos. Everyone knew about it, but no one had dared to try. Although there are many cliffs and difficult climbs on Réunion (including a possible 9a+), no one climbs trad. The concept is quite unknown.

Opening the route was tough work, with many scary moments as we skirted huge boulders balanced on the virgin wall. There were question marks every night. We always wondered if the next pitch would go, or if we would be stopped in our tracks. That's the very special thing with ground-up opening: You soon realize that you aren't the one creating—it's more the route revealing itself to you. Amazing rock, beautiful shapes, surprising methods—every pitch turned out different, every section unique. I feel privileged to have been part of this adventure. My little island home now holds one of the hardest multi-pitches in the world.

Caroline Ciavaldini, France

Editor's note: Zembrocal has seven pitches (7a, 7a, 8a, 8a, 8a, 8c+, 6c, 7a). Two of the pitches are fully bolted; most require a rack of protection. All of the pitches were redpointed, but the route has not had a continuous free ascent. A beautiful and highly detailed topo can be found at the AAJ website.

## Images



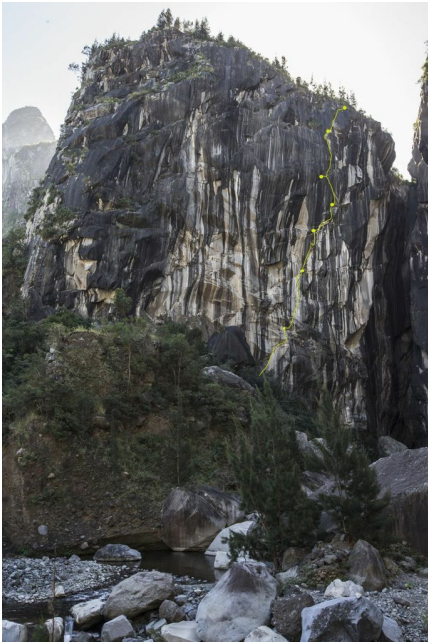
Yuji Hirayama on the crux fifth pitch (8c+) of Zembrocal.



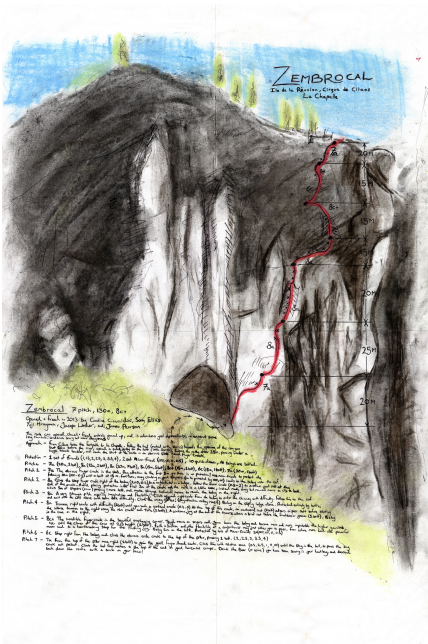
Yuji Hirayama on the third pitch of Zembrocal.



Caroline Ciavaldini after battling the third-pitch chimney on Zembrocal.



The line of Zembrocal.



Topo for Zembrocal, Réunion.



Caroline Ciavaldini leading the sixth pitch of Zembrocal.

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